

## ENHANCING STUDENTS' MOTIVATION IN WRITING THROUGH COOPERATIVE LEARNING AT THAI NGUYEN UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCES

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### ABSTRACT

Teachers seem to be real artist in language teaching. They should make use of a variety of methods and techniques to enhance their students' participation in the lessons then gradually improve their communicative competence. Especially in teaching writing, it demands teachers for enthusiasm and patience in getting students actively involved in lessons. Many authors have led teachers to believe that cooperative learning in class is a powerful teaching approach because of its widespread use as a contemporary teaching technique. This descriptive study aimed at examining the enhancement of students' motivation in writing English at Thai Nguyen University of Sciences through cooperative learning strategies. Several recommendations were also included to enhance the motivation of learners in learning writing.

**Key words:** *motivation, writing, cooperative learning, Thai Nguyen University of Sciences*

*Received: 22/01/2019; Revised: 11/3/2019; Approved: 28/3/2019*

## NÂNG CAO ĐỘNG LỰC HỌC VIẾT CHO SINH VIÊN THÔNG QUA HOẠT ĐỘNG HỌC TẬP MANG TÍNH HỢP TÁC TẠI TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC KHOA HỌC, ĐẠI HỌC THÁI NGUYÊN

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### TÓM TẮT

Giáo viên ngoại ngữ dường như là những người nghệ sĩ thực thụ trong giảng dạy ngôn ngữ. Họ phải sử dụng vô số các phương pháp, kỹ thuật để tăng cường mức độ tham gia bài của sinh viên từ đó cải thiện khả năng giao tiếp. Đặc biệt, việc giảng dạy kỹ năng viết đòi hỏi giáo viên phải thực sự nhiệt tình và kiên nhẫn để có thể thu hút sinh viên tham gia tích cực vào bài học. Nhiều giáo viên tin rằng hoạt động học tập hợp tác là một phương pháp hữu hiệu vì nó đang được sử dụng rộng rãi như một kỹ thuật giảng dạy hiện đại. Nghiên cứu này nhằm tìm hiểu việc nâng cao động lực học kỹ năng viết cho sinh viên tại Trường Đại học Khoa học thông qua việc sử dụng kỹ thuật học tập hợp tác. Bài báo cũng đưa ra một số gợi ý cho việc khuyến khích sinh viên tăng cường hứng thú đối với kỹ năng viết.

**Từ khóa:** *động lực học, kỹ năng viết, hoạt động học tập mang tính hợp tác, Trường Đại học Khoa học- Đại học Thái Nguyên*

*Ngày nhận bài: 22/01/2019; Ngày hoàn thiện: 11/3/2019; Ngày duyệt đăng: 28/3/2019*

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## INTRODUCTION

English is a dominant international language in communication, science, business, aviation, entertainment, radio and diplomacy. It is the language of the global marketplace, global village. [1] In Vietnam, following a rather unstable past, Vietnam has stabilized and seen an influx of foreign diplomacy policy over the past several years. Due to this boost in international involvement, the demand for English has taken off. And the study of English has always partaken of a plurality consciousness since the time it began in the first decades of the century. English is now included in the curricula program of every school, especially at universities and colleges, with the focus on the development of the four skills reading, writing, listening and speaking.

Writing is necessary when students further the study, especially at the university level. They need good writing skills for acquiring knowledge and expressing their understanding. However, of the four language skills that learners need to acquire, writing seems to be is the most difficult skill [2] for non-English majors at the universities and colleges to master. It can be seen from a small survey that most students' writing abilities at Thai Nguyen University of Sciences aren't good enough. Even some students cannot produce a complete sentence. Many students after leaving universities and colleges are not able to write short texts in English for their career fields or for study purposes.

At Thai Nguyen University of Sciences, English is a basic subject which accounts for totally 10 credits and is normally taught in the first two years of bachelor programs. It

follows the communicative orientation with the integration of the four skills listening, speaking, reading and writing. However, to master this language is not an easy task for the students who come from mountainous areas in Northern Vietnam with rather limited

English competence. They face numerous difficulties in speaking and in writing using the language. The reason lies in the fact that many students are hesitant to communicate with their teachers and classmates in English because they have few opportunities to do so. On one hand, when students cannot understand the lesson, they are not motivated and become passive in the classroom. On the other hand, better students are sometimes hesitant to help the slow learners since they are not required to do so.

In classrooms, teachers aim at developing their students' abilities to speak, to listen, to read and to write. Writing occupies the last place in this order, but it does not mean that it is the least important. In fact, it is a necessary skill when learners want to further their study. Moreover, writing is a tool for expressing critical thinking, reasoning, discovering, creating and sharing ideas and knowledge, and it allows writers to present those ideas, feelings and cultural knowledge through various kinds of writing strategies.[3] Therefore, developing writing ability for learners is one crucial purpose of language teaching. However, students have a lot of difficulties in this skill such as not knowing how to express their ideas because of the lack of vocabulary and grammar. Sometimes, their products seem to be chaotic pieces of writing. With all these, students gradually lose their interest and self-confidence in writing. For teachers, teaching writing skills is not an easy task. It demands much more than teachers' enthusiasm, which further requires that teachers must be flexible in using appropriate teaching methodology to get students involved and motivated in writing.

It is in this context that the researcher would like to conduct the study in the hope that cooperative learning may be effective in enhancing the students' motivation in writing to get involved and to participate more in writing lesson activities.

## COOPERATIVE LEARNING AND MOTIVATION

Johnson & Johnson [4], leaders of cooperative learning since the 1970s, define it as “the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other’s learning”. Cooperative learning refers to a method of instruction where students work together in groups to reach common goals. Within cooperative learning, students benefit from sharing rather than working alone. Students help one another so that all can reach certain success.

Cooperative learning not only brings students opportunities to use the language but also to discover its vocabulary and grammar. Furthermore, students’ social skills are enhanced through the cooperation with other members of groups. Students become more engaged in their learning and their motivation increases. To be motivated to learn, students need opportunities to interact with each other as well as encouragement and support of their learning efforts. By working in groups and fulfilling the tasks that require interdependence, each group member becomes accountable for achieving a shared goal. Students are then motivated by the team efforts as well as by seeing their own contributions accepted by the group. The active exchange of ideas within small groups not only increases the interest among the students but also promotes critical thinking. [5]

## SUBJECT AND METHODOLOGY:

The research used the descriptive method to discover the effects of cooperative learning on students’ motivation in writing. A motivation survey was delivered before and after students were exposed to cooperative learning in writing lessons. The respondents of this study were 60 students coming from the two classes of General English randomly chosen for the experiment at Thai Nguyen University of Sciences during the second semester of the

academic year 2017-2018. The data gathered were described statistically using percentage, frequency and standard deviation.

## FINDINGS

The respondents of the study were 80 first year non-English major students at Thai Nguyen University of Sciences. Most of them are female (63%) coming from mountainous provinces in North of Vietnam.

Table 1 shows the students’ motivation in writing in the pre-test and post-test. The results indicate some significant changes.

For the pre-cooperative learning motivation survey, it can be noted that students seem to show little interest in learning writing. They claimed to “*feel bored*” and “*confused*” when learning writing. Specifically, the students, generally disagree with the statements: “*When learning writing I feel involved*” (1.88); “*I like what I am learning in this class*”(1.98). Moreover, the respondents identify the clear purpose of learning writing. They agree with the statements: “*It is important to learn what is taught in this class*” (2.95); “*I expect to pass the final exam after attending this class*” (3.00). Especially, the students strongly agree “*Doing well in this class and passing the final test is the most important goal for me*” (3.28). However, the respondents show rather negative attitude toward their motivation. The students seem not to be motivated in learning writing. Specifically, they disagree with the following statements: “*I like what I am learning in this class*” (1.98); “*I make good use of my class time*”(1.98). Further more, they agree with the following ones: “*I often wish I were doing something else in writing class*” (3.15); “*During class time I often miss important points because I am thinking of other things*” (3.00); “*When work is hard, I either give up or study the only easy parts*” (3.00); “*I often fell lazy or bored in the class that I have trouble finishing my assignments*” (3.08). The students fail to show clear

purpose of learning. They gradually lose their interest and find no reason for making efforts. Moreover, although the students realize the importance of regular class attendance, they show little confidence in their ability in writing lessons. The students disagree that *"Compared with others in this class, I think I am a good student"* (1.88); *"If I can I want to get better scores in the subject than most other students in the class"* (1.88).

For the post-cooperative learning motivation survey, after four weeks of being exposed to cooperative learning, the students seem to show positive motivation in learning writing English. The students claim to get *"involved"* in writing lessons and find them not *"boring"*. More importantly, like before the experiment, the students still keep clear purpose of learning. *"Doing well in the class and passing the test"* are considered their main purpose of *"attending writing lessons regularly"*. Moreover, it is worth noticing that the students' motivation in writing is positive. Specifically, they agree with the following statements: *"I like what I am learning in this class"* (3.10); *"It is important to learn what is taught in this class"* (3.10); *"I make good use of my class time"* (3.12). In addition, the students tend to have reasonable confidence in their writing abilities. They agree that *"Compared with others in this class, I think I am a good student"* (3.10).

Comparing closely students' motivation before and after cooperative is exploited, it can be revealed that the students' purposes of learning remain unchanged. More importantly, the students obtain more positive motivation in learning writing and show better confidence in their writing abilities. With the employment of cooperative learning strategies, students' motivation has been enhanced. By collaborating with other learners in brainstorming and groups discussion, they get involved in the lessons and focus more on learning. They gradually

find out the inspiration for learning and improve their self-confidence in their study.

#### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

Findings of the study revealed that students' motivation in learning writing at Thai Nguyen University of Sciences has been enhanced with the use of Cooperative Learning. They all have positive attitude towards this skill and claim to be motivated in their lessons.

Basing on the findings of the study, some recommendations can be drawn:

Cooperative Learning becomes very important in language learning for several reasons. It affords the language learners greater opportunities to practice the language in real communication in which each students has a role and activities are prepared so that student engagement is both cooperative and independent, thus maximizing the participation of all members in groups. When engaged in Cooperative Learning, students are not passive participants in the classroom, but become active in their own language development. Furthermore, students' social skills and abilities to solve problems in cooperation with others are enhanced.

It is advisable that cooperative learning strategies should be employed in teaching languages in general and in teaching writing in particular. Specifically, teacher should continuously monitor the work of not only the group but also the individual members. It is necessary to identify those who try to become irresponsible from the task to make sure that active members do not lose their interest in collaboration with others. There is need to structurally plan for cooperative learning approach. Without proper preparation, cooperative learning may not provide learners with the quality experience. Moreover, it is recommended to use this approach for writing skills because cooperative learning provides ideas from different members of the group, which encourages students to get more involved in writing lessons.

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**Table 1.** Students' motivation in writing before and after being exposed to cooperative learning

Statements	Pre-test		Post-test	
	Weighted Mean	Description	Weigh-ted Mean	Description
1. When learning writing I feel				
a. involved	1.88	Disagree	3.10	Agree
b. bored	3.10	Agree	1.98	Disagree
c. confused	3.05	Agree	3.00	Agree
2. I often wish I were doing something else in writing class.	3.15		1.88	Disagree
3. During class time I often miss important points because I am thinking of other things.	3.00	Agree	2.50	Disagree
4. It is important to learn what is taught in this class.	2.95	Agree	3.10	Agree
5. I like what I am learning in this class	1.98	Disagree	3.00	Agree
6. I expect to pass the final exam after attending this class.	3.00		3.00	Agree
7. Compared with others in this class, I think I am a good student.	1.88	Disagree	3.10	Disagree
8. When work is hard, I either give up or study the only easy parts.	3.00	Agree	1.98	Disagree
9. I attend this class regularly.	3.00	Agree	3.28	Strongly Agree
10. Doing well in this class and passing the final test is the most important goal for me.	3.28	Strongly Agree	3.28	Strongly Agree
11. If I can I want to get better scores in the subject than most other students in the class.	1.88	Disagree	1.88	Disagree
12. I want to do well in this class because it's important to show my ability to my friends, family, empowers and others.	1.98	Disagree	3.08	Agree
13. I often fell lazy or bored in the class that I have trouble finishing my assignments.	3.08		3.08	Agree
14. I make good use of my class time.	1.98	Disagree	3.12	Agree

Legend:

- 1.0 – 1.75 Strongly Disagree  
 1.76 – 2.50 Disagree  
 2.51 – 3.25 Agree  
 3.26 – 4.00 Strongly Agree